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ABSTRACT

Educators from the teacher, administrator, and school-board associations of the states of Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Oregon joined with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to highlight the achievements of the public schools in preparing children and youth for a successful and fulfilling life, and to note the significant participation of the associations in these endeavors. This summary is a way of sharing the practices deemed effective by the associations, and of offering them as resources for others. All five states can be justifiably proud of their students' academic achievement. On a variety of measures, students from the Northwest score as high, and usually higher, than their peers at the national level. This pattern has held and recently been strengthened, despite the challenges of persistent childhood poverty, rapidly increasing numbers of students whose first language is not English, and the mainstreaming of special-education students. The report presents the results of an international benchmarking study whose purpose is to provide useful student-achievement information about the performance of states relative to other countries. It broadly compares state 8th-grade mathematics and science performance for each of 44 states and jurisdictions participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress with that of 41 nations who participated in the third International Mathematics and Science Study. (Contains 15 references.) (DFR)

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TOPICAL SUMMARY JUNE 2001

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY
Planning and Program Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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ED 457 582

Public Education in the Northwest

Achievements of the Past Decade

The [Alaska] legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State....

It shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of free common schools.

It is the goal of the people [of Montana] to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person.

The [Oregon] Legislative Assembly shall provide by law for the establishment of a uniform and general system of Common schools.

It is the paramount duty of the state [of Washington] to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.

These words from the constitutions of the five Northwest states describe their vision for the public education of their children. What have been the achievements of the public education system, and what challenges will states face in this decade?

Educators from the teacher, administrator, and school board associations of the five Northwest states joined with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) to highlight the achievements of the public schools in preparing children and youth for a successful and fulfilling life, and to note the significant participation of the associations in these endeavors.

This summary is a way of sharing the practices deemed effective by the associations, and of offering them as resources for others.

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ACHIEVEMENTS

All five states in the Northwest region can be justifiably proud of their students' academic achievements. On a variety of measures, students from the Northwest score as high, and usually higher than, their peers at the national level. This pattern has held and recently strengthened, despite the challenges of persistent childhood poverty, rapidly increasing numbers of students whose first language is not English, and the mainstreaming of special education students.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) offers a compelling

This summary draws on a small sampling of practices, centered on the work of the state education associations. Others are also making enormously significant contributions. Note that a practice of one state may be occurring in other Northwest states, as well. To follow up on areas of interest, page 23 lists contact information for each participating association.

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view of the strengths of student achievement in the Northwest region. The NAEP is a congressionally-mandated program of the U.S. Department of Education, which describes the program as "the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas."

The first operational state-level NAEP reports are from 1996 for math and science, and 1998 for reading and writing. Alaska, Montana, Oregon, and Washington participated in all the 1996 math and science assessments, and Montana, Oregon, and Washington participated in the 1998 reading and writing assessments. More than 80 percent of the region's students are enrolled in the states that participated in both the 1996 and 1998 assessments. Representative samples of students in grade 4 were tested in math and reading; students in grade 8 were tested in math, science, reading, and writing.

- On the 1996 Math Assessment, all four participating Northwest states had scale score results significantly higher than the national average at the eighth-grade level.
- On the 1996 eighth-grade Science Assessment, three of the four participating Northwest states tested significantly higher than the national average.
- On the 1998 Reading Assessment, all three participating Northwest states tested significantly higher than the national average at the eighth-grade level.
- None of the participating Northwest states was below the national average scale score on any of the NAEP tests.

The U.S. Department of Education has linked the state-level NAEP data to the Third International Mathematics and Science Standards assessments. Linkage data are taken from a National Center for Educational Statistics report, *Linking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS): Eighth-Grade Results* (NCES Publication 98-500), which states:

> This report presents the results of an international benchmarking study whose purpose is to provide useful student achievement information about the performance of states relative to other countries. It broadly compares state eighth-grade mathematics and science performance for each of 44 states and jurisdictions participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) with that of 41 nations who participated in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).
>
> This is a research and development effort that statistically links the 1996 state results from NAEP with the 1995 country results from TIMSS. Because these two assessments (NAEP and TIMSS) contained different content, and were taken by different students at different times, only limited information can be provided from this statistical linking technique.

Highlights from the NAEP-TIMSS Linkage include:

- **Grade 8 Mathematics**: All four Northwest states that participated in the 1996 NAEP ranked in the "Top 10" when compared to the 41 nations in the TIMSS assessment. An estimated 55–65 percent of these states' students would score in the top 50 percent of TIMSS test takers internationally.

SAT 1994

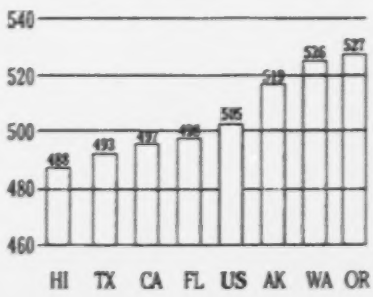
	Verbal	Math
Alaska	510	502
Oregon	513	515
Washington	511	512
United States	499	504

SAT 2000

	Verbal	Math
Alaska	519	515
Oregon	527	527
Washington	526	528
United States	505	514

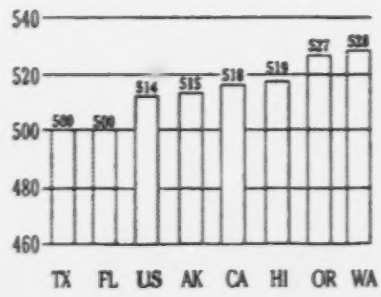
SAT Verbal Score Averages, 2000

For states with 45 to 55 percent of graduating seniors taking the exam



SAT Math Score Averages, 2000

For states with 45 to 55 percent of graduating seniors taking the exam



• **Grade 8 Science**: All four Northwest states participating in the 1996 NAEP ranked in the "Top 10" when compared to the 41 nations in the TIMSS assessment. An estimated 58–75 percent of these states' students would score in the top 50 percent of TIMSS test takers internationally.

SAT Trends and Comparisons

Compelling evidence of recent improvements in student performance is found in Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) results since 1994:

• Verbal and math score averages have increased substantially in all five Northwest states since 1994.

• Three states with the highest rates of participation in the SAT (Alaska, Oregon, and Washington) increased their composite verbal and math score averages by 22, 26, and 31 points respectively compared to the national increase of 16 points since 1994.

• Two states with SAT participation rates that are substantially lower than the national rate (Idaho and Montana) also increased despite having relatively high SAT averages already.

The SAT participation rates in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington are high enough to allow valid comparisons to national scores. The rates for Idaho and Montana are too low to allow for comparison. In 1998, the percentage of graduating seniors who had taken the SAT were U.S., 43 percent; Alaska, 52 percent; Idaho, 16 percent; Montana, 24 percent; Oregon, 53 percent; and Washington, 53 percent.

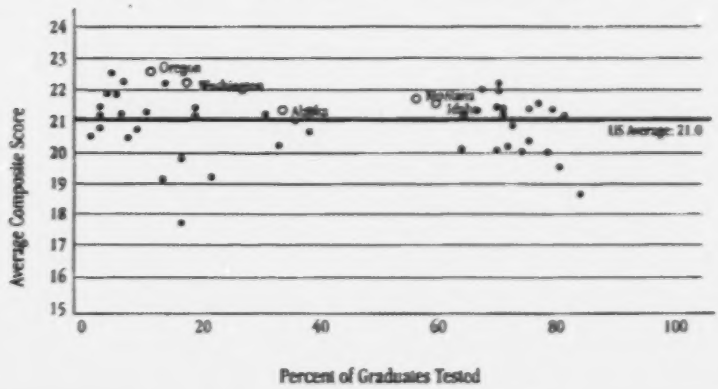
• The 1998 and 2000 score averages for Alaska, Oregon, and Washington were above the national averages.

• Alaska, Oregon, and Washington have the highest SAT score averages among states with similar test-taking rates. Of the seven states with 45–55 percent of 1998 graduating seniors taking the SAT, the three states had higher scores than California, Florida, Hawaii, and Texas. The results in the three Northwest states are especially impressive because their test participation rates are in the upper end of the comparison range. (See charts on page 2.)

ACT Comparisons

American College Testing (ACT) averages follow a pattern similar to the SAT, with all five Northwest states above the national average. (See chart below.)

American College Testing (ACT) Avg. Composite Scores by State 2000



Norm-Referenced Testing

Alaska: On all three subjects tested (reading, language, and math), Alaska students performed well above the national expectation of 25 percent in the top quartile. (See chart below.) In fact, in both grades tested, more than 30 percent of Alaska students scored in the top quartile in every subject.

Alaska CAT-5 Test Results Spring 2000

Alaska Students in Top Quartile:

	Reading	Language	Math
Grade 4	31.9	30.7	37.3
Grade 7	31.9	31.7	38.1

Idaho: The results from Idaho's annual achievement testing are also impressive. In the fall 2000 ITBS/ITED results, six of nine grades tested had composite scores in the 53rd percentile or higher (compared to a 50th percentile national average). Reading performance was especially strong with seven of nine grades in the 56th percentile or higher.

Montana: In past years, Montana has not had a statewide achievement testing program. Most districts have selected one of three nationally-normed assessments (ITBS, Stanford, or CTBS), though, and Montana students have performed very well. In 1997–98, the latest school year for which a comprehensive review was available, students in grades 4, 8,

and 11 had average reading scores in the 55th national percentile or higher on all three tests. Average math scores were in the 54th percentile or higher.

Washington: Norm-referenced test results are also very strong in Washington state. Third-grade results were especially high this spring (2001)—with reading at the 57th percentile and math at the 64th—and they represented a gain over the already impressive results from the previous year.

Standards-Based Testing

Oregon: Third-, fifth-, eighth-, and 10th-graders have consistently improved during the last four years of testing on the Oregon Statewide Assessment. (See chart to the right.)

Washington: The most recent results from the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) show progress from 1999 to 2000 in all three grades tested in math, reading, and writing, with 10th-grade writing showing the only decline. The proportion of students meeting the fourth-grade standards was up 4–6 percent in each of the three subjects. In the seventh grade, math and writing scores had the strongest improvement and in the 10th grade, reading performance showed the largest gains. (See chart to the right.)

Oregon Statewide Assessment Trends

Percent Meeting Standards

	1998	2000	2001
GRADE 3			
Reading/Literature	78	82	84
Writing	-	60	-
Math Multiple Choice	67	75	75
GRADE 5			
Reading/Literature	66	73	77
Writing	27	34	-
Math Multiple Choice	61	70	73
Math Problem-Solving	37	57	-
Science	-	69	-
GRADE 8			
Reading/Literature	55	63	62
Writing	34	35	-
Math Multiple Choice	50	56	55
Math Problem-Solving	41	49	-
Science	-	56	60
GRADE 10			
Reading/Literature	48	51	52
Writing	40	45	-
Math Multiple Choice	32	40	42
Math Problem-Solving	31	42	-
Science	-	55	57

Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) Trends

Percent Meeting Standards

	1999	2000
GRADE 4		
Mathematics	37.3	41.8
Reading	59.1	65.8
Writing	32.6	39.4
GRADE 7		
Mathematics	24.2	28.2
Reading	40.8	41.5
Writing	37.1	42.6
GRADE 10		
Mathematics	33.0	35.0
Reading	51.4	59.8
Writing	41.1	31.7

High School Graduation

More than one million (1,066,455) students graduated from Northwest public schools between 1991 and 2000. The number of graduates per year increased by 28 percent from 98,141 in 1990 to an estimated 119,514 in 2000. The rate of increase in the Northwest varied from 17 to 35 percent, double the national rate (28 percent vs. 14 percent). Northwest schools were able to strengthen academic achievement during a period of great strain caused by rapid growth.

The high school completion rate of 18- through 24-year-olds is approximately the same in the Northwest as in the nation: Northwest, 84.2 percent; United States, 85.5 percent (using a three-year weighted average for 1997–1999 and based on the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, an annual telephone survey). The ratio of high school graduates to the population 17 years of age is also approximately the same in the Northwest as in the nation: Northwest, 68.5 percent; United States, 69.4 percent (using spring 1997 regular day school graduates divided by the 17-year-old population estimated by the Census Bureau as of July 1, 1996).

Educational Attainment

The Northwest has a high percentage of people 25 years and older with a bachelor's degree: 26.6 percent in the Northwest compared to 25.6 percent in the United States. It also has a high percentage of people 25 years and older who have completed high school: 89 percent in the Northwest compared to 84 percent in the United States. (Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey: Educational Attainment in the United States, March 2000 [P20-536 Package].)

Sustaining Quality Teaching & Learning

Teaching and learning are the critical tasks of education. No educational system can succeed without quality instruction and the ability to motivate students to learn, especially during a time of standards development and reform to fulfill the goal of No Child Left Behind.

There are challenges. In Idaho, for example, 88 of 113 school districts serve students with limited English proficiency. Through collaboration and professional development, the public schools are helping these children, who come from all over the world, make the transition from learning in their native languages to learning in English. Native English speakers also benefit from the inclusion of nonnative speakers who remind us how important it is to prepare all children to participate in the global community.

Other children are served by special education programs. Because of the range of abilities among special-needs children, these programs can be time-consuming and costly. Yet, believing all children deserve the same opportunities, Idaho has successfully focused on training educators, counselors, administrators, and others who help in the classroom to use a variety of approaches to meet the educational and social needs of special-needs children.

Teacher Professional Development

Northwest teachers are increasingly advancing their research-based knowledge and classroom practices through professional development, taking advantage of activities offered by teacher associations, for example, and rigorous certification processes at state and national levels. Here is a glimpse.

Alaska: The Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) is based on a statewide partnership involving the Alaska Council of School Administrators, Alaska's 53 school districts, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, the National Education Association of Alaska, and a number of professional education associations and corporate sponsors. Each year, nearly 5,000 teachers and administrators take part in more than 200 face-to-face and distance-learning professional development activities under the ASDN flag.

Network programs have included topics such as: Implementing and Refining a Standards-Based System for ALL Students, Leading Your School and District to Excellence, and Breaking Ranks, a research-based model for school improvement developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Idaho: Professional development is emphasized through the reading initiative, reform of teacher education programs, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification process.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), in existence for fewer than 10 years, is a rigorous training opportunity for experienced teachers. It offers a voluntary yearlong training program for teachers, after which participating teachers can "stand for certification." Nationally, fewer than 50 percent of the teachers participating are certified each year.

Because the program is expensive and time-consuming, most teachers need support. The J. A. & Kathryn Albertson Foundation has provided significant financial support, and many school districts throughout Idaho provide emotional and educational support. Idaho currently ranks ninth in the nation, with more than 200 NBPTS-certified teachers. Each year, more Idaho participants are certified than the national average, due in large part to the support provided by the Albertson Foundation and the public education community.

Montana: Montana, too, places great attention on professional development, and National Board Certified-teachers are rewarded with one-time, $3,000 stipends. The state also funds

three days of professional development for teachers each year. Accreditation standards, adopted by the Board of Public Education, require that all teachers receive professional development opportunities; and all certified personnel are required to obtain a minimum of 60 hours of professional development every five years—40 hours of college credits—to obtain recertification.

One of Montana's most significant public education achievements is the widespread effort of its teachers to advance their professional knowledge and skills. In 1996, for example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that average math and science scores for Montana fourth- and eighth-graders were among the best in the nation; they also discovered that many more Montana teachers participate in targeted professional development activities than teachers in the rest of the country.

In Montana, as in other Northwest states, teacher associations sponsor activities. The annual Montana Educational Association-Montana Federation of Teachers Educators Conference includes workshops, college-level courses, and other inservice training opportunities for teachers in almost every content area and grade level. It is the largest professional development conference of its kind in the nation.

Montana is focusing more attention than ever on the relationship between quality teaching and quality learning. With a major revision of Montana's teacher certification standards planned during 2001, this trend is likely to continue for the next several years. Among the strategies to support and strengthen the teaching professions have been:

- Creating two governor-appointed commissions that suggested a variety of improvements in state and local policies dealing with teacher preparation, recruitment, retention, and professional development.
- Creating the Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council (CSPAC), establishing guidelines and useful research for the improvement of the teaching profession.
- Creating the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation to support the Montana Teacher Forum, the Montana Teacher of the Year Program, and National Board Certification workshops for candidates.
- Developing peer-mentoring programs in school districts around the state.

Oregon: The Curriculum Directors' Network has provided key district administrators with access to best practices in improving student achievement, assessment, standards-based education, and connection to the Oregon Department of Education. Key leaders support the work of those new to curriculum leadership roles, enabling districts to move ahead more quickly in successfully implementing Oregon's school reform.

Washington: Throughout Washington, teachers are involved in aligning assessment, instruction, and teacher professional development with standards. Among the activities at many schools that capture these activities are:

- Participating in school and district efforts to align curriculum and instruction with the state essential learning requirements.
- Improving knowledge and skills in curriculum mapping, lesson and unit design, and creating classroom-based performance assessments. Many schools are increasing the opportunities for teachers for collaborative planning, reviewing student work, and developing curriculum.
- Assisting other teachers as they increase their assessment literacy and use a variety of assessments, including performance-based assessment, appropriately. Assessment cadres of teachers provide training for their colleagues.
- Many teachers routinely use scoring guide "rubrics" in evaluating student work and helping students evaluate their own work.
- Participating in the planning and conducting of professional development in which teachers become familiar with the state learning standards and curriculum alignment processes.
- Using action research as a collaborative approach for improving learning and teaching, teachers are learning to use data more effectively.
- Participating in schoolwide improvement activities that use a variety of approaches and models. Some examples include:
  - ✓ "Keys to Excellence in Your School" (KEYS) developed through research by the National Education Association, supported by Washington Education Association
  - ✓ Onward to Excellence II, developed by NWREL
  - ✓ Success for All, developed at Johns Hopkins University
- *Perspectives*, a Washington Education Association database on school restructuring, available on the WEA Web site, provides a vehicle for schools to share their experiences with others.
- A partnership of school districts, the Washington Education Association, and the state Office of Public Instruction is developing a career standards

and evaluation project called the Art and Science of Professional Teaching: A Developmental Model for Demonstrating Positive Impact on Student Learning.

• Washington efforts to improve preservice and inservice professional development opportunities include the following:

✓ Legislation was passed in 2000 that created a state educator professional standards board to develop alternative routes for teacher certification. This board has responsibility for decisions about teacher testing.

✓ A new certification program was implemented that includes a performance-based component. Preservice teachers will be expected to demonstrate their ability to affect student learning as part of the requirements for the residency certificate. Moving to the second-tier professional certificate requires teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the standards. These processes require collaboration of higher education, school districts, and teachers.

✓ Teachers participate in planning and implementing professional development programs in many districts, through Educational Service Districts and the professional organizations. Inservice opportunities are beginning to change from one-shot opportunities for building awareness to more embedded and school-specific activities, including some that offer occasions to learn, practice, reflect, and improve.

✓ The Washington Education Association sponsors a number of teaching and learning cadres that provide training for peers on a range of topics, such as assessment, special education, teaching diverse learners, and other topics.

✓ Mentoring and coaching roles are increasingly components of inservice programs. Each member of the Math Helping Corps of expert teachers was assigned to two schools to help improve teaching and learning in mathematics.

A partnership of school districts, the Washington Education Association, and the state Office of Public Instruction is developing . . . the Art and Science of Professional Teaching: A Developmental Model for Demonstrating Positive Impact on Student Learning.

The associations are quick to credit others, such as colleges of education throughout the Northwest, as instrumental in teaching-and-learning endeavors. For example:

• NEA-*Alaska* highlights education support personnel as keys to student learning, along with the unmet need for professional development for support staff and for inclusion of their knowledge in school activities and decisions.

• *Idaho*'s colleges and universities are also charged with improving the instruction provided to children. They have evaluated their teacher education programs to ensure that Idaho's teachers are better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the classroom. For example, teachers-in-training are given more opportunities to engage with students, and the student teaching experience now extends beyond the traditional eight weeks.

• Education faculties within the *Montana* University System have worked to develop ongoing professional development opportunities for educators through partnerships with professional curriculum groups and certain Montana school districts. These partnerships have been effective in promoting a culture of professional development activity among Montana teachers.

Technology, Teaching, and Learning

Technology is rapidly changing what we do and how we do it. Computers now help us control our finances, communicate, and seek information. Young people must learn how to use computer hardware and software, and how to update their information when new or revised applications become available. Students must learn to evaluate the credibility of information, to use information ethically, and to

make informed decisions. To teach these skills, public schools must provide state-of-the-art technology and training. Both administrators and teachers need to understand how this technology can enhance and accommodate various school and student needs. Critical to the teaching and learning process is helping teachers to integrate computers into the classroom, enabling technology to enhance and move learning forward.

Alaska: Alaska superintendents, in a recent Alaska Council of School Administrators' survey, identified two technology accomplishments: connecting all schools to the Internet, making it possible for all students and staff to have direct access for instruction and research, and opening the system to the community after school hours; and employing a person full-time to provide technology training for instructional staff and students.

Technology and distance education hold great promise, but there is little agreement on standards for distance-learning programs. Research is needed into the effectiveness of these cyber programs; increasing statewide delivery could decrease duplicative local-district cyber programs.

Idaho: During the past seven years, the Idaho legislature has invested $10.4 million each year to provide public schools with technology. Computers and software have also been provided by Idaho companies interested in promoting technology. The J. A. & Kathryn Albertson Foundation has provided $250,000 to each district for technology. The Idaho Board of Education has focused on ensuring that educators are trained in technology. School boards and administrations have been providing release time and training so educators can learn to use technology effectively in the schools.

An especially innovative use of technology in Idaho has been the Magic Valley Artech Program. Fourteen school districts and the College of Southern Idaho share technological resources via satellite.

Montana: The 2001 Montana Legislature approved legislation that allows school districts to set up a technology acquisition and depreciation fund. This fund supports both computer hardware and software and professional development to assist in bringing technology into the classroom. The University of Montana has been a leader in developing distance-learning curricula that will help serve the needs of nontraditional students and those who learn better outside a classroom.

Safe Schools

Schools must be drug-free, safe, and orderly so teachers can teach effectively and students can maximize learning time. Collaborative efforts have led to partnerships with agencies and organizations that can help us teach children to live safe and drug-free lives and reach those students who are already affected by drug use or violence.

Alaska: Alaska recognizes that children thrive with the support and involvement of healthy families and communities, notes the Alaska Association of School Boards, recognizing that when children are healthy, safe, and confident they are more likely to learn and succeed. With that understanding, many entities in Alaska have focused their efforts and resources on creating an environment that will include direct and positive community involvement with children and youth.

NEA-Alaska notes that teachers, as well as students, have realized improvement in school safety as the result of significant legislation; collaboration with parents, law enforcement, and state agencies; and heightened awareness. Implementation of effective strategies and effective response to incidents continue to depend on local districts and, as a result, the association continues to handle regular requests for representation for teachers in unsafe situations.

Idaho: In Idaho, many agencies and organizations have recognized the overlap in their missions. To make the most efficient use of resources—time, money, equipment, and staff—these groups have sought partnerships. For example, public schools often partner with law enforcement agencies on programs to discourage drug use or to promote safety. Because of interagency agreements and shared funding between public schools and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, social workers can monitor children with special needs to help them become productive students as well as healthy citizens. These social workers can also coordinate efforts with various other agencies to provide the appropriate expertise.

The Children's Alliance in Idaho Falls is an innovative approach to helping children with problems. Various social agencies and organizations created a panel to which students with emotional, social, or physical problems can be referred. The Children's Alliance also created a community service center where students who were sus-

pended can go for educational and social development. When they return to school, they have not fallen behind and they may have developed some strategies that will help them succeed in school.

Washington: The Washington Association of School Administrators pioneered the first comprehensive Safety/Security Review process for the state in 1997. This program offered an analysis of the physical, environmental, and educational qualities affecting safety and security. The results of the analysis help school districts address facility needs, personnel training needs, climate issues, and future security-related projects. The review teams have identified key variables that can help school districts identify the current status of safety/security and create a comprehensive plan that addresses potential hazards facing schools. Similar efforts by the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction have defined guidelines for schools to use in assessing current needs, providing a continuum of education for students, training the staff, preparing for crisis, and cooperating with all agencies supporting safety in the schools.

Schools and communities working on safety issues are having an impact. *Community Update* (February/March 2001), a newsletter published by the U.S. Department of Education, points out that to believe schools aren't safe is a misperception created by high-profile shootings. Violent death at school is rare.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

The Northwest, like the nation, is faced with an unprecedented shortage of teachers and administrators. Unfortunately, Northwest school systems are too often outbid by schools in other states in their quest to attract the people they need to make up for retirements and the loss of outstanding educators who are leaving the field for higher-paying jobs. Retirement rates are increasing as baby boomers reach retirement age and this trend is compounded by increasing rates of early retirement. Recruitment and retention issues threaten the ability of the Northwest states to continue their impressive record of educational achievement.

Current supply and demand for four Northwest states is cited by the American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) in its *2001 Job Search Handbook for Educators* (pp. 8–9). Washington, Oregon, and Idaho are grouped in a single region by AAEE; Alaska is also a single region, and Montana data are grouped with the states of Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. Except for Alaska and Hawaii, which are their own regions, data are not disaggregated by state.

Northwest school systems are too often outbid by schools in other states in their quest to attract [educators] ....

In the AAEE Region 1 of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, teaching areas cited as having a "considerable shortage" (demand code of 5.00–4.21) are bilingual education (4.75), mathematics education, and all areas of special education, which range in demand code from 4.43 to 5. Teaching areas cited as having "some shortage" (demand code of 4.20–3.41) are business education (3.5), computer science education (3.67), ESL (4.10), Spanish (3.75), reading (3.50), biology (3.73), chemistry (4.09), earth/ physical science education (3.70), physics (3.91), and general science (3.45).

Alaska: In Alaska (AAEE's Region 10), a "considerable shortage" of teachers exists in all special education areas and in speech education (both 5). "Some shortage" exists in bilingual education, business education, computer science education (all 4); English/language arts, journalism education, French, German, Japanese, Spanish (all 4); mathematics (3.50); general music education, reading (both 4); biology, chemistry, earth/physical science education, physics, and general science (all 4); social studies (3.50); and technology education (4).

Northwest education associations report the difficulties currently being experienced, a forecast of increasing problems, and steps being taken to improve the situation.

NEA-Alaska reports that attracting and retaining quality teachers is a growing challenge. Some of the factors affecting this are flat teacher salaries, lack of support and mentoring for beginning teachers in many local districts, and special education workloads.

The average salary of teachers in Alaska, where the cost of living

is extremely high, has fallen from as high as second in the nation to seventh during the 1990s. This fall has had two significant effects: (1) It is more difficult to attract teachers to Alaska, especially since the lower 48 states have improved salaries and benefits; and (2) It is more difficult to retain teachers.

Montana: In Montana, a growing number of teachers are now being assigned to teach courses they are not qualified or prepared to teach. Stories of science teachers being asked to teach math, English teachers being asked to teach music, and classroom aides being asked to teach in general are becoming more common as districts struggle to find qualified personnel.

Montana school districts sought to hire approximately 550 new certified teachers in 2000 (Teacher Retirement System Data, 2000). In August, more than 200 positions were still being advertised as vacant throughout the state. While most Montana districts were able to fill their vacant positions, the problem may worsen in the near future.

Because of a rapidly aging teaching force with many teachers due to retire, it is expected that Montana could need nearly 1,600 new teachers during the next two years. This comes at a time when almost one-third of Montana's newly certified teachers are taking jobs out of state, while another third will not enter the teaching profession. At the University of Montana and the Montana State University Schools of Education, about 75 percent of education graduates this past year are leaving Montana to take teaching positions out of state.

The largest contributing factor to this situation is low teacher and administrator salaries. Montana has difficulty competing with California, Nevada, Texas, and other states that pay starting salaries far in excess of those offered in Montana. Many states offer signing bonuses, loan forgiveness programs, and other incentives as well. Shortages in teachers were first noted in certain areas such as special education, math, and science. Currently, the shortages are being felt across the curriculum.

The Montana School Boards Association and the Montana Rural Education Association did an informal survey of school districts during the 2001 Legislative Session to gauge the severity of recruitment and retention issues for Montana school districts. The findings are included in a report by Dori Nielsen entitled *Who Will Teach Our Children?*

Building Strong Leadership

If schools are to continue to change in the 21st century, strong leadership is needed to provide the vision and direction. Administrators need to be community leaders and visionary instructional leaders. The new leadership model will require institutions that prepare administrators to change through continuous staff development.

Administrator Professional Development

Alaska: Alaska school leaders at the superintendent and board levels are pursuing greater teamwork, working more effectively as a leadership team. Top leaders are discovering that inclusive leadership is essential to ensuring success for students in the classroom. Virtually everyone is committed to making sure that there is room under the umbrella for students, parents, and community to be able to deliver on the promise of an excellent education for all.

Montana: In Montana, a variety of administrator-development activities are occurring at both local and state levels:

- The Billings school district established an intern program for aspiring principals, "growing their own" or grooming principal successors.
- The superintendents' association implemented peer mentoring, assigning a mentor to every superintendent new to the position or new to the state, plus holding regional monthly meetings that assist them in management and policy skills.
- The Montana Conference of Education Leadership—sponsored by the School Administrators of Montana, the Montana Association of School Business Officials, and the Montana School Boards Association—is a three-day professional development conference. State conferences for superintendents, secondary principals, elementary principals, directors of special education, and county superintendents have included a professional development strand.

Oregon: The Confederation of Oregon School Administrators provides professional development for approximately 2,200 school- and district-level administrators on topics that support improved student achievement and bolster effective administrative leadership. Recent professional development topics included:

- Leadership symposia on quality classroom instruction, acting as school change agents, and brain-based learning
- Legal issues seminar
- Special education laws
- Creating safe schools seminars
- Parents as partners
- School improvement plans that work
- Maximizing human potential in schools

Washington: The Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) is making a key contribution to the achievement of standards-based educational reform in the preparation and training of administrators.

The ability to help teachers align curriculum with academic learning requirements, to provide training in proper use of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, and to supervise these activities are integrated in preparation of standards as well as ongoing professional development activities offered throughout the year.

WASA encourages well-qualified educators to seek administrative certification and leadership positions. Workshops, training sessions, and regional meetings have all been used to augment the existing corps of administrators with talented new participants.

Standards

The Northwest education associations demonstrate strong leadership committed to preparing students in a standards-based environment for the 21st century.

Alaska: The Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) has been engaged in developing the QS2 (Quality

School Quality Students) Comprehensive School Improvement Service, intended to provide direct assistance for selected districts and a model for all districts in the state. In considering the factors necessary to truly improve education, AASB felt that attention only to the school program and staff was not enough to effect improvement. Other major factors in this model are development of leadership for the district, varied and abundant resources, and community/parent engagement. The focus on community/parent engagement is an extension of the priority that AASB and school boards have been promoting for the last decade.

The components of QS2's school improvement rely heavily on community engagement. A district inventory includes information collected from personal interviews with parents and other community members. Strategic planning includes broad-based stakeholder involvement. And, of course, community engagement itself is a focus of the QS2 model; districts that follow the model can't help but include this element as a subject of their school improvement efforts.

In support of their efforts to improve education for Alaska's and our nation's children, the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) was awarded a $4.9 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in September 2000. Reengineering and transforming instruction will be the spirit of this grant program, using what has been learned from the six school teams that have reached the upper levels of ACSA Academy programs. ACSA's bottom line is helping all students, whatever their social, economic, or racial/ethnic backgrounds, to become peak performers, and paving the way for them to excel in the knowledge/information age.

Idaho educators and other interested groups have developed measurements for determining whether the curriculum, educators, and students are succeeding.

Idaho: Idaho educators and other interested groups have developed measurements for determining whether the curriculum, educators, and students are succeeding. Instead of letting textbooks drive the curriculum, the Idaho public education community has been identifying what students with a solid foundation should be able to do. These performance standards guide the content and skills taught to Idaho students. Standards for students enable effective curricula and appropriate measurements of success to be developed.

Montana: While Montana communities have maintained local control over their school districts, curriculum and accreditation standards adopted at the state level influence teaching and learning. New performance-based curriculum standards were adopted by the Board of Public Education after an open process of review involving educators from across Montana that was coordinated by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). The Board of Public Education has adopted new accreditation standards for professional educator preparation programs that focus on student outcomes and performance as determined for program quality.

Washington: The Washington Association of School Administrators has focused on several key elements of educational reform and improvement in recent years, including expanding professional development for administrators to foster school improvement and accountability. That effort initially focused on support of the state Commission on Student Learning and the following Accountability Commission. Special training programs have provided a four-year curriculum supporting the improvement of student learning through staff development, planning, and accountability through Project Leadership. The association developed significant assistance for administrators in supporting school improvement through the publication/training *Aligning Supervision and Evaluation to Education Reform—A Toolkit for Administrators*. The *Toolkit* publication and workshops have been provided all over the state and hundreds of administrators have upgraded their efforts. Conferences and workshops dedicated to providing information, techniques, and skills to better equip administrators to assist students and teachers in refining curriculum and assessment to match state standards have been provided.

Data and Support for Decisionmaking

Educational administrators are faced daily with the need to locate information. Some of that information is related to educational reform, some involves fiscal rules, or contract law, or school boards. Northwest education associations have been developing a range of effective tools to help administrators keep pace, increasing access to and usability of data to make informed decisions.

Montana: The Montana School Boards Association, School Administrators of Montana, and Montana Rural Education Association support a state technology depreciation fund that could be supplemented by local communities to help meet the challenges of bringing technology to the classroom.

Oregon: The Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) provides a powerful school information search site through its EduPortal. This service has online access to all Oregon statutes (ORSs), Department of Education Rules and Regulations (OARs), some federal rules, and OARs of other state agencies (e.g., Teacher Standards and Practices Commission), and has the ability to place local district policies online. Districts can search all these documents.

COSA also has extensive legislative data on its Web site. They provide bill summaries, a log of bills important to schools, daily legislative reports, a weekly summary of bills scheduled for legislative action, and a regularly updated log of actions taken on important bills. COSA publishes four department newsletters for all members.

In 1997 COSA published a report of the Oregon Association of School Executives titled *Keys to a Quality Education*. The study highlights research on what is known and practiced in educational improvement. The document has stimulated dialogue between educators and policymakers about the components of a quality education and what it costs to provide it. *Keys* has become the basis for discussion and further work at the state level. The Speaker of the House led a special committee, the Legislative Council on the Quality Education Model, which used *Keys* as its base document in building the first version of a model for connecting education costs to education results. It was used as a base work when the Commission on Quality Education completed its work on the Quality Education Model–2000.

When the governor and state superintendent of public instruction appointed a commission to develop the Quality Education Model–2000, a COSA staff member who had been involved with the work on *Keys* was made available. That commission's work has become the basis for the Governor's 2001–2003 school budget and is the "driver" for the discussion about what funding level is needed for the state to fulfill its promise of offering all students an opportunity to meet high state academic and learning standards.

COSA also produces many special reports, such as the elementary principal's *Practices That Matter Most*, middle level *Best Practices Manual*, and occasional *Pocket Card Facts*.

The Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) has been educating school boards and the public about Oregon's database initiative project, created to help state and local decisionmakers establish a set of criteria to allow valid comparisons of education spending from the capitol to the classroom. OSBA details Oregon's national leadership to identify elements and associated costs of a quality education in its *Focus on Critical Issues* (Fall 2000) booklet. The Quality Education Model (QEM) incorporates the most important elements to foster student achievement as determined by research findings, classroom practice, and public opinion. The model, now in use by school districts to make hard choices, can factor in many various elements, such as class size, number of teachers, all-day or half-day kindergarten, and estimate related costs and impacts.

Washington: The Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) has developed a thorough and aggressive system for evaluating the effectiveness of school districts. This system, called the Management Review Program, has resulted in more than 70 studies provided for school districts. The Management Review Program assesses effectiveness across 18 major program areas in a school district, analyzing current practices, pointing out inefficiencies, determining legal compliance, recommending improved approaches, always focusing on how the school district can better support student learning. The reviews have provided the platform for planning in school districts all over Washington and have saved thousands of dollars.

Another data tool developed by WASA collects thousands of pages of information from many sources and applies a rapid search process to it. This system, utilizing an Internet site maintained by WASA, allows instant access to information that might have taken hours to locate using conven-

tional means. The software supporting the system is the fastest, most comprehensive available and places school administrators ahead of the technology curve in serving their districts.

Washington is training administrators to use technology effectively in schools and in their own work. One broad-based program supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was the Smart Tools Academy, intended to increase educational administrators' knowledge about technology and their skills in applying it. The Washington Association of School Administrators participated in planning the activities, establishing a curriculum, and administering the specific institutes. A large percentage of school administrators in the state have participated in various institutes held since the program's inception.

Administrator Recruitment and Retention

Strong leadership and management skills are crucial for local districts and schools to continue the focus on quality teaching and learning, the wise use of capital resources, and effective staff deployment and support. Yet, national reports and state associations report a serious lack of qualified applicants and people aspiring to be administrators, particularly high school principals and superintendents. At the same time there is more competition for applicants who possess leadership skills.

The American Association for Employment in Education's *2001 Job Search Handbook for Educators* (pp. 8–9) rates the region of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho as having a "considerable shortage" of superintendents and high school principals. In the "considerable shortage" range, the Alaska region rated most severe in all administrative categories for all regions. (Washington, Oregon, and Idaho are grouped in a single region by AAEE; Alaska is also a single region, and Montana data are grouped with the data for Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico.)

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School Administrators of Montana points out that the reasons cited for the decline in interest nationally are also found in Montana: intense job stress, excessive time requirements, difficult parents, low compensation, poor image, and social problems.

Northwest administrator associations report not only the challenge but also activities targeted to meet it:

- The **Alaska** Council of School Administrators has taken a lead role in building a deeper understanding of this crisis and the opportunity it provides to make education careers even more attractive. School board members, administrators, teachers, and other education and community leaders agree the crisis must be dealt with before it becomes a catastrophe. Actions being taken include professional development, attracting needed resources, and pursuing greater teamwork among school leaders and communities.
- In **Oregon**, the Confederation of School Administrators (COSA) has developed two services that provide information and referrals for people looking for school district employment. The Web-based Jobs-on-Line is a listing of all employment opportunities in Oregon school districts. Certificated, other professional, and classified job openings can be listed by school districts on the Web site. Job seekers anywhere can apply to the district for employment. On any given day there are 120–250 jobs listed; there are about 37,000 visitors to the site each month. Twenty-five percent of the visits are from the Northwest but every state is represented. More than 700 visits a month are from other countries. In addition to this Web-based source, COSA keeps a log of recently retired school administrators who can fill interim needs for districts with unanticipated vacancies during a school year. ▮

Building Strong Communities

States delegate their trust for a free education for all children to local authorities—school boards. Elected by their local communities, school board members reflect the wishes and points of view of their constituents. Strong communities and strong schools are intertwined; each fortifies the other.

Since Montana's earliest days, for example, community schools have been a vital component of the state's social fabric and they remain so today. "In fact," says the Montana Education Association-Montana Federation of Teachers, "the public school is the only remaining institution and community hallmark in several present-day Montana 'towns.' As a result, public schools in Montana, and their everyday activities, occupy a great deal of public attention and involvement."

Community Partnerships

School boards provide the critical link between schools, parents, and the community, notes the Oregon School Boards Association. With one foot in the community and the other in schools, school board members are uniquely positioned to listen to the concerns of everyone who has a stake in education.

The Oregon School Boards Association and the Washington State School Directors Association are providing "how-to" information to local boards about a public-meeting process that ensures both the public and board can get the information they need in an encouraging and welcoming environment that fosters productive communications.

Idaho: Idaho's story during the past 10 years, report the Idaho associations, is typical of those in the Northwest states:

> A decade ago we recognized that we could change the future of public education—and that we *must* change the future of public education—if we were to provide Idaho children with the solid foundation they needed to be lifelong learners. We realized our children's future would be different from the futures we faced when we were young. They were born into a world abounding in technology and information. Because the pool of information changes and increases by the minute, we recognized that we must prepare Idaho's children to use information, that facts alone would not prepare them. We also saw that our children would interact in an international environment. Preparing them for life in our local communities was short-sighted. But while we recognized the vast opportunities our children would have, we were also concerned with education challenges:
>
> • *A Nation at Risk* and other books shared Americans' concerns that children were not being prepared for their futures, that schools were failing in critical areas, and that communities were not responding to what children needed.
>
> • Some Idaho parents wanted open enrollment and more choice in the education of their children.
>
> • The Idaho legislature mandated fundamental changes to public education to attain greater school accountability.

Idaho undertook collaborative activities on a large scale, actively engaging the community in improving public education. Idaho education associations call attention to the fact that the public education community must ensure that all parties who have a stake in public education are involved, that they will not agree on many issues, but all the perspectives are valid and will lead to better solutions. Within the last decade, public education in Idaho has changed and improved. But collaboration comes with its own limitations, say the Idaho associations:

> Working together with diverse groups can be time-consuming and frustrating. Participants in collaborative processes often want to walk away! And yet, those who care for Idaho's children—the school board members, school administrators, teachers and other educators, parents, foundations, government agencies, and even the students themselves—know that would be a

serious mistake. Decisions about public education are no longer made in isolation. And life has become too complex to allow us to think that we can solve difficult problems without the benefit of all perspectives.

Alaska: In 1990, the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) and its members adopted a Child Advocacy mission statement that makes explicit community engagement and collaboration: *The advocacy role of school board members is to promote parental, public, and social service commitment to the shared responsibility of educating all children*. AASB has dedicated a portion of its long-range plan to this concept, addressing advocacy education of school boards, promoting collaboration with communities and others, supporting legislation, and increasing public awareness. Despite the difficulties posed by Alaska's unique geographic and demographic conditions, AASB has spent much of the last 10 years building a critical mass of parent and community support for Alaska's children and schools. Among some of its collaborative activities:

AASB has developed an "Assets" initiative (based on research done by the Search Institute), directing many of its resources toward collaborating with Alaskans—individuals, organizations, and agencies—to work together as communities toward building "assets" in all Alaskan children. Assets have become a part of the vocabulary of both students and adults across the state and asset building has become a galvanizing force in many communities.

In collaboration with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and 22 other partners, AASB published and distributed 72,000 copies of *Helping Kids Succeed, Alaskan Style*—an asset-building handbook for schools, parents, and communities. Using that as a centerpiece, AASB led 192 student, teacher, and community workshops and trained 253 individuals to facilitate asset-building initiatives in their own communities, from Alaska's largest city (Anchorage) to some of its smallest villages. In 2001 Alaska's senior U.S. senator passed a federal appropriation of $2 million to support this effort.

AASB also took the lead in collaborating with DHSS and three other agencies in organizing a statewide Asset Building Conference attended by teams of adults and teens from across the state, focusing on how to promote asset building in their lives and their communities.

In 1997 AASB developed Board Standards that have integrated the concept of community involvement in the decisionmaking processes of the school districts. Almost 50 percent of the school boards in Alaska have formally adopted these standards and are actively developing locally appropriate means to include individuals, organizations, and business partners in establishing the vision and structure of their school districts. The standards also require school boards to provide greater accountability to parents and communities regarding the effectiveness of district efforts to increase student achievement.

As part of the regular update of its Long-Range Plan, the AASB Board of Directors in 2000 identified a new goal: *To assist school boards in promoting broad-based community engagement to shape and enrich the education of Alaska's children*. By establishing this as a priority, the board is ensuring that AASB will develop tools and identify resources that local boards will need to be successful in this endeavor.

Montana: Local control and community support are credited by the School Administrators of Montana and the MEA-MFT for the state's quality educational system of national ranking.

Montana schools are experiencing more than a 95 percent passage of local mill levies to demonstrate this support, and more than 100 school districts have developed a school-to-work partnership. These partnerships help the community to be involved in the educational process of their students. The local boards of trustees have control over the curriculum offerings, scheduling, and hiring practices. This gives the local educational systems an opportunity to respond to the learning needs of the district students.

Teaching and learning in Montana schools are community endeavors. In a survey completed in 1996, 99 percent of responding Montana schools cited at least one example of a community-school partnership that yielded enhanced learning opportunities for children (School Pride State Pride Survey, 1996). In addition, 113 of 165 eligible high school and K–12 school districts in the state have developed formal school-to-work partnerships that require business and community involvement in the education of their students (OPI data, 2000). More than 90 percent of Montana school districts have been successful in winning public approval of building bonds and mill levies in recent years, funneling badly needed

resources to classroom and learning improvements.

The Education Forum, which promotes improved communications within the educational community, includes the Montana School Boards Association, the School Administrators of Montana, Montana Education Association - Montana Federation of Teachers, Montana Rural Education Association, Office of Public Instruction (OPI), Board of Public Education, the Commissioner of Higher Education, and representatives from local school districts.

Oregon: The Oregon School Boards Association and the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators conduct a number of activities to increase community understanding of public education. Among them:

- OSBA administers a statewide telephone survey of Oregon voter attitudes toward public education. Conducted biennially during the state's legislative sessions, which are held in odd-numbered years, the survey samples perceptions of Oregon's public schools and school improvement.
- The OSBA's State Report Card Tool Kit, provided to all school districts, shows school personnel how to use school and district report cards to communicate school strengths, changes, and challenges. The toolkit is available on the association's Web site <www.osba.org>.
- OSBA supports the Statewide Organization for Schools' (SOS) "Back to School Week." Last year's initial celebration drew hundreds of citizens into Oregon schools for a firsthand glimpse of today's classrooms. Since 75 percent of Oregon voters do not have children in public schools, this effort shows local communities public education in action.
- OSBA's Salute to Success is a recognition-award program. Each month Salute to Success highlights an innovative, successful program a school board adopted to increase student achievement and community engagement. OSBA pays special attention to how boards are meeting Educational Act for the 21st Century goals and using the NSBA's eight areas of responsibility. Winners receive awards and recognition at the OSBA Annual Convention.
- The Confederation of Oregon School Administrators conducts training sessions with administrators to develop community support. Many school people talk about the need to be involved politically; these workshops focus on the "how to," with appropriate cautions about district policies and state laws that govern what is legal.

Washington: The Washington Education Association (WEA) focuses on building and strengthening relationships among families and schools. Activities vary depending upon the region of Washington; some include:

- Involving parents in the KEYS (Keys to Excellence in Your Schools) school improvement approach
- Including a parent trainer as part of the WEA special education training for school staff and parents
- Conducting public forums to build common ground among school and community
- Promoting parent and teacher conferencing
- Creating Family Resource Rooms in schools
- Engaging in action research to create change in middle level schools
- Involving coalitions of churches, labor organizations, and education associations to work for quality schools
- Developing site councils and democratic decisionmaking processes in schools
- Training parents as trainers of other parent/guardians to assist their children's learning

The Oregon School Boards Association targets its resources to help boards focus on student achievement

School Board Development

School board members are private citizens who have a deep concern for and interest in public education—and they also have work and family responsibilities. Public education is a complex endeavor that carries with it legal, fiduciary, and policy-making duties, including those relating to curriculum and instruction. Many school trustees, once on board, are surprised at the depth of knowledge they need to perform effectively. Ongoing development for school board members is crucial. The following training activities indicate the commitment and intent of school board associations in the Northwest to prepare members to set policy for 21st-century teaching and learning, and for the support systems that enable it.

Montana: Trustees are elected volunteers and are the schools' direct link to their communities. Training opportunities are available through the Montana School Boards Association for trustees to learn more about school operations and governance. Workshops cover school law, school funding and budgeting, policy development, community relationships, labor relations, superintendent evaluations, and lobbying the legislature. The School Board Academy grants educational credits for school trustees who attend training workshops.

Oregon: The Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) provides resources and training so school board members can work effectively with their schools and communities. The Leadership Academy helps board members sharpen their leadership and communication skills and learn how to work as a team. Leadership Oregon, OSBA's advanced school board leadership training program, offered every two years, provides specialized training to help board members who are emerging as leaders in state and local public education examine their roles and responsibilities in education public policy. School boards, through their actions in eight areas—vision, standards, assessment, accountability, alignment, climate, collaborative relationships, and continuous improvement—can put student achievement at the center of what they do. The Oregon School Boards Association targets its resources to help boards focus on student achievement.

Washington: Acting as a bridge between educators and the community is one of a school board's major roles. The board must communicate to its staff the expectations of the community, but it must also inform the community about what the educational staff learns about its students and schools. Both of these parties to education need to know what the other stakeholders know and need. The board of directors is the broker, the mediator, and often the translator. The Washington State School Directors Association encourages local school directors to become involved with legislators, city councilors, and county commissioners.

Washington educational leaders have taken great pains to involve their communities and to help their businesses and media leaders understand what reform means to their children and to the tax structure. Student test scores have been compelling, with more than 60 percent of the schools meeting their three-year goals within two years, indicating that things are proceeding in a positive direction.

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Funding

Although schools in the Northwest are making gigantic strides, they are faced with a continuing tug between skyrocketing expectations and limited resources. The amount of money allocated to schools to maintain past achievements as well as to meet new challenges will dictate how well we prepare students. Many education leaders feel that current funding levels are close to jeopardizing our public educational systems.

Alaska: While the threat of a tax cap was soundly defeated in the November 2000 election, Alaska schools and school systems are faced with budgets that are inadequate to match increasing expectations. The Alaska Council of School Administrators is working to help legislators and Alaskans realize that foundation funding for schools must stay ahead of inflation if the state hopes to even maintain the status quo.

An Alaska Council of School Administrators' survey of Alaska superintendents reveals increasing class sizes; declining enrollments in many districts; demands for instruction aligned to new student performance standards; backlogs in replacement or renovation of inadequate, overcrowded, unsafe school facilities; the need to ensure equitable funding for all schools and all students, including the native population; and the need to maintain a comprehensive curriculum.

NEA-Alaska points out that class size is both a rural and an urban issue: "In rural classrooms teachers are expected to teach multi-grade level or multi-subject classes while in urban classrooms

more and more students are packed into already overcrowded classrooms. Alaska has historically been within the top 10 states in the percentage of enrollment growth from one academic year to the next. The decades of growth have outpaced our classrooms."

Idaho: Facilities are also a problem for public education. Educators, administrators, and counselors struggle to provide a solid foundation for lifelong learning while too many students attend school in crumbling buildings that don't even provide access for some disabled children. Though many resources have been dedicated to technology, the structures housing that technology can be inadequate and even dangerous.

Montana: During the past decade, school funding in Montana has diminished to a level that is insufficient to meet state and community expectations. Most school districts in Montana have been forced to reduce or freeze their overall budgets. Coupled with a six-year trend of declining enrollments throughout the state, the funding formula has necessitated stringent reductions and several school closures. Many districts have been forced to sacrifice quality programs, activities, and course offerings.

How bad is the funding problem in Montana? Between 1991 and 1999, total state expenditures for K–12 education grew by a total of 4.5 percent, approximately one-fifth of the cumulative growth in inflation during those same years. On a per-pupil basis, the increase was only 0.4 percent, 1/50th of the comparable growth in inflation. Growing costs of building maintenance, technology improvements, salaries, special education services, and many other needs forced districts in Montana to rely on local property taxpayers to foot the bill for necessary budget increases. As a result the state's share of school general fund budgets slipped from 71 percent in 1991 to 62 percent in 1999 (OPI Data, 1999).

Local taxpayers have shouldered the increased share of funding schools. Because Montana's funding formula is based on the number of students—per ANB (Average Number Belonging)—a decline in enrollment presents a budget-balancing challenge for a school district. Montana school districts are labor-intensive; on average, nearly 80 percent of school budgets are spent on personnel. Even with modest annual increases in salaries, total labor costs continue to grow even when a district experiences a decline in enrollment—and a decline in state funding.

Increases in state per-ANB contributions to Montana schools have not kept pace with inflation. Districts have closed elementary schools, cut programs, reduced the number of teachers and staff, and deferred maintenance trying to achieve a balanced budget.

With the increasing costs of fuel, labor, and equipment most Montana school districts have experienced a significant increase in the cost of operating (or contracting out) their school buses. Bus services are mandated by state statute and the state reimbursement for a portion of the costs of operating has not increased since 1991. Any increase in local transportation levies must be submitted to the voters for approval. If transportation levies fail, the costs of operation must be covered from the general fund.

Many districts are restricted from asking their local taxpayers for enhanced budget authority. Under Montana's mandated school district spending limitations, the state is the only remaining entity that can substantially assist nearly 40 percent of Montana's school districts to maintain quality services. Without additional assistance from the state, these districts will be forced to continue the very difficult budget and program rescissions that have become commonplace throughout Montana.

In response to the challenges of inadequate funding, school districts have found ways to increase their efficiency and continue to provide a quality education to students.

- Montana Schools Group Workers' Compensation Risk Retention Program (WCRRP)—Montana School Boards Association member districts benefit from this program, which provides lower annual operating costs and has returned more than $3,500,000 in premium credits to member districts during the past five years.
- Montana Schools Unemployment Insurance Compensation Program (MSUIP)—This program, sponsored by the Montana School Boards Association and the Montana Association of School Business Officials, provides unemployment insurance coverage at reduced rates for participating Montana schools.
- Big Sky Investment Pool—This new program is being developed by the Montana School Boards Association, School Administrators of Montana, and the Montana Association of School Business Officials to seek a greater return on school investments.
- Cooperative Purchasing Pool—This new program would allow school districts to achieve savings through volume purchasing. The Montana School

Boards Association, Montana Rural Education Association, School Administrators of Montana, and Montana Association of School Business Officials are working cooperatively on legislation to give school districts the needed authority.

- Montana Unified School Trust (MUST)—This program, sponsored by the Montana School Boards Association, MEA-MFT, and School Administrators of Montana, includes a health care program for school employees with savings to school districts through premium stability. MUST is now the largest cooperative health insurance provider in Montana.
- A Montana School Boards Association-sponsored natural gas contract was negotiated in 1998, saving participating school districts more than $600,000 annually.
- A Montana School Boards Association–sponsored electrical contract has saved participating districts more than $150,000 annually, and those savings are increasing as the regulated rates skyrocket.

Oregon: In 1991 the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators organized the Superintendents' Funding Coalition. The coalition includes all local district and educational service district superintendents. It has a Steering Committee of 40 superintendents that has become the common voice for schools on school finance issues. They meet and debate all policy issues related to school funding; they come to agreement on those positions that are in the best interest of all the students in Oregon. In the past two years, both the governor and the state superintendent of public instruction have met directly with the coalition. When faced with any important funding question, legislators now ask, "What is the Funding Coalition's position?" Because they are deliberate, representative, influential with their colleagues, and fair to all interests, they are a respected and sought-after voice.

The most recent survey of public perceptions commissioned by the Oregon School Boards Association listed "lack of funding" as Oregon schools' most serious problem.

Washington: One of the major components of improving student achievement is the quality of classroom environments and instruction. A key factor in this area is class size. Accordingly, WASA played a major role in supporting Initiative 728, which was passed overwhelmingly, to provide funding to improve class size and student achievement. The association, in partnership with the Washington State School Directors Association, has also provided an annual Legislative Conference to inform legislators about the status of education reform and the need for sustaining progress.

The Washington School Directors Association points out that voters also approved Initiative 732 by more than 62 percent. It provides an automatic annual cost-of-living (COLA) salary increase for school district personnel. This is the only such automatic COLA for any public employee group in Washington State. The passage of this initiative adds to the picture of broad public support.

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Alaska Council of School Administrators
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907-586-9702
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Association of Alaska School Boards
316 W. 11th St.
Juneau, AK 99801-1510
907-586-1083
www.aasb.org

NEA-Alaska
114 Second St.
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907-586-3090
www.ak.nea.org

IDAHO

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Idaho Association of School Administrators
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Boise, ID 83705-1548
208-345-1171
www.idschadm.org

Idaho School Boards Association
5909 W. State St.
Boise, ID 83703-3039
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MONTANA

School Administrators of Montana
1134 Butte Ave.
Helena, MT
59601-5178
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1232 E. Sixth Ave.
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Montana School Boards Association
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360-493-9231
www.wssda.org/wssda/WebForms/En-Us/Default.asp

"Teaching and learning are the critical tasks of education. No educational system can succeed without quality instruction and the ability to motivate students to learn, especially during a time of standards development and reform to fulfill the goal of No Child Left Behind."

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